United Nations

Press Release

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees takes control of Zakho transit camp in northern Iraq.

- General Assembly acts without vote on broad reform programme for economic and social work of United Nations; calls for emergency help to Bangladesh.

- Under-Secretary-General for International Economic and Social Affairs opens first regular session of Economic and Social Council saying Gulf crisis has reinforced recessionary tendencies in world economy.

- Office of United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator to meet in Geneva with heads of United Nations Children's Fund, World Food Programme and High Commissioner for Refugees to consider revised plan of action for Gulf region.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) announced today that it had decided to take control of the allied refugee camp in the town of Zakho in northern Iraq. The agency said in a press communiqué that the decision was taken after determining that the completed camp had been demilitarized and would continue to receive direct relief support from the coalition forces.

Citing the pressing humanitarian needs of hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced Iraqis, the agency said it had assumed responsibility for the camp consisting of some 19,000 Kurds on the expectation that the current conditions of security would prevail.

According to the communiqué, about 200,000 Iraqis were beginning to return home after their month-long refuge along the mountainous Turkish-Iraqi border. The spontaneous repatriation movement had reduced the total population of the eight border camps to 230,000 people, while another 100,000

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were scattered outside camps along the border, it said. In addition, some 80,000 of the 1.3 million refugees who had found sanctuary in Iran had also started for home, the agency reported.

In a related development, Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar told correspondents this morning that he had received information from Baghdad that the Iraqi authorities and the Kurds were making progress in talks currently under way to find a solution to the refugee problem.

Commenting on the proposal of a "police force" to protect the Kurds, he said the three Western countries in the Security Council for the proposal -- France, the United Kingdom and the United States -- might try to present a draft resolution to China and the Soviet Union. He said there was new thinking on the subject concerning protection of human rights even if it meant an infringement on the sovereignty of a Member country.

Asked about the role of his Executive Delegate, Sadruddin Aga Khan, in the attempt to persuade the Iraqis to accept a police force, the Secretary-General said his main role was to help the Iraqi population, not only the Kurds but the Shi'ites in the south who were often forgotten. Sadruddin Aga Khan was also instructed to raise the question of a police force in order to get the Iraqi authorities' consent before any Council action.

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A broad reform programme for the economic and social work of the Organization, focusing on the Economic and Social Council, was adopted this morning by the General Assembly in a resolution approved without a vote.

In another resolution adopted without a vote, the Assembly called on Member countries to provide emergency assistance to Bangladesh in the wake of the devastation wreaked there by the recent cyclone.

On the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations economic and social role, the Assembly called for a new work programme for the Economic and Social Council starting in February 1992.

The resolution also called for a four-day organizational session of the Economic and Social Council in February and a four- to five-week substantive session between May and July, to take place alternatively in New York and Geneva.

When it meets again on Thursday, 16 May, the Assembly will consider the report of the Assembly's Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) on financing the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and will take up a draft resolution on special emergency assistance to Haiti.

In a separate development, the Secretary-General has appealed to Member States to make advance contributions to finance the repatriation aspect of MINURSO.

In an addendum of 8 May to his recent report on the new peace-keeping force, he appealed for voluntary contributions totalling $34.5 million to be paid in full and in time for the UNHCR repatriation programme which he said was an essential political element in the settlement proposal. He said he was of the view that MINURSO should not be deployed at the target date unless it had received the necessary voluntary contributions. The overall cost of the Mission was estimated at $200 million. To date, no voluntary contributions have been received.

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A temporary surge in oil prices, disruptions in trade, the curtailment of workers' remittances and the destruction of production facilities during the Gulf crisis have reinforced recessionary tendencies in the world economy, according to Rafeeuddin Ahmed, Under-Secretary-General for International Economic and Social Affairs.

Mr. Ahmed made that statement this morning as the Economic and Social Council opened its first regular session of 1991. He predicted that while the world economy is expected to experience some slow growth in 1991, per capita output would fall for the second year in a row.

Also addressing the Council this morning was Margaret J. Anstee, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna and Head of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. Ms. Anstee stressed the need for a unified and effective structure for social questions in the United Nations. If that key question were left unaddressed, it would be difficult to fulfil the Charter requirement "to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom".

At the current session, the Council is expected to consider such matters as the Programme of Action for the Second Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination; the report of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations; the world social situation; social development; human rights questions; the advancement of women; narcotic drugs; and emergency assistance to Somalia.

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The Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) has announced that it will hold in Geneva on 15 May an important meeting convened by the Disaster Relief Coordinator, M'Hamed Essaafi, with the heads of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNHCR present.

In a report dated 10 May, the agency said Sadruddin Aga Khan would present to the participants a revised plan of action for the region which would provide the framework for integrating actions already under way. Current efforts entailed in two separate plans cover countries neighbouring Iran and Iraq itself.

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